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The Occupational Roles of Women and Ethnic Minorities on Primetime Television in Belgium. An Analysis of Occupational Status Measurements.

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Abstract

In this study, we investigate differences in occupational status between women and men, and between ethnic minority and majority members by means of a content analysis of Belgian primetime television in 2013. We evaluate the accuracy of these television portrayals using interreality comparison strategies. Results indicate that, although in television content women obtain higher average scores for occupational status than men, this is mainly due to the underrepresentation of women in low-status occupations. While previous studies focused on the absence of women in high-status jobs, this analysis shows for the first time that women are also absent in low-status manual and industrial jobs. Ethnic minorities have lower average scores for occupational status. Moreover, interaction terms made clear that this especially holds for female ethnic minorities, suggesting that mechanisms of intersectionality are at play. In general, the labor world as portrayed on television diverges strongly from the real labor world.

Key words*:* Occupational prestige, Media portrayals, Gender, Ethnic minorities, Stereotyping, Intersectionality, Belgium

Television can be considered as a major socialization agent in contemporary societies, and this also holds for the portrayal of professional and occupational roles (Signorielli, 1993). If systematic patterns are found in the type and the demographic distribution of occupational roles frequently portrayed on television, this might cultivate stereotypical views about the labor world. Previous research has suggested that women and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in highly prestigious occupations compared to men and ethnic majority members (Eschholz, Bufkin, & Long, 2002; Signorielli, 2009).

A majority of these studies, however, focus on just some specific occupations, and therefore do not offer a comprehensive view of the entire labor market. There are hardly any studies available that include internationally comparable standard measures of occupational prestige to quantify and to substantiate their claims (exceptions are Eschholz et al., 2002; Glascock, 2001), and this is exactly what we want to contribute with this paper. Although the concept of intersectionality, i.e. the idea that different axes of inequality 'intersect', has recently received more attention in the theoretical literature, the impact of double minority status on television portrayals of occupational status has not yet been formally investigated (Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Verloo, 2006). In addition, virtually all studies explicitly addressing occupational prestige are based on US evidence (Eschholz et al., 2002; Glascock, 2001; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2009). Moreover, studies that have used interreality comparisons to test whether television portrayals of occupational prestige reflect the real labor force remain scarce. Finally, in recent decades the labor market has undergone considerable changes, and it cannot be assumed that studies conducted two decades ago (Signorielli, 1993) still offer valid insights. The present study is designed to address all of the above issues.

First, our study operationalizes occupational prestige by attributing internationally recognized prestige scores to a wide range of occupations in a detailed and standardized manner. In this way, our study includes all occupations depicted on television, and constitutes a comprehensive investigation of the labor world. Second, the study not only examines the impact of gender and ethnic status separately, but also assesses their combined effect on occupational prestige on television. Third, it focuses on Belgian primetime television, and it can therefore supplement current knowledge, offering perspectives for cross-cultural generalization. Fourth, we evaluate the accuracy of television portrayals of occupational roles by relating them to real-life indicators. Finally, as the demographic composition of the labor market is changing rapidly, we believe it is necessary to update some of the older research. In short, via a mix of quantitative tools and using recent evidence from Belgium, this study aims to contribute to the debate on the stereotypical depictions of women and ethnic minorities in occupational roles on primetime television.

Theoretical Framework

The mass media in general, and television in particular, can be considered as one of the major socialization agents in contemporary society. In Belgium, for instance, more than three-quarters of the population spend at least one hour watching television on an average weekday. Only 3.8% of the Belgian respondents never watches television (ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data, 2012). If television plays a central role in the socialization processes of viewers, an analysis of the messages disseminated by television becomes essential.

Theories on media framing suggest that social reality can be constructed by the selection of frames, i.e. a set of organizing principles that are collectively shared (Entman,

1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In this way, frames portray some facets of a perceived reality by increasing its salience, thereby stimulating certain interpretations and evaluations over others (Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2001). As processes of framing are typically related to power relations, framing can be expected to occur with regard to specific demographic groups, such as women and ethnic minorities. Media framing of women and ethnic minorities may reflect patterns of prejudice and perpetuate stereotypes in society (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). These patterns of prejudice, however, do not necessarily take the shape of blatant and explicit prejudice: processes of subtle prejudice may be at work. Subtle prejudice is 'cool, distant and indirect' (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, p.58). It generally refers to how certain characteristics of outgroups are exaggerated, and is aimed at reinforcing existing social power relations. Research has suggested that television is now abandoning more explicit forms of prejudice and stereotyping in favor of more subtle practices (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Entman, 1992). This is closely related to Clark's typology of evolutionary stages of minority portrayals ('non-recognition', 'ridicule', 'regulation' and 'respect') in mass media. The final stage of 'respect' is crucial here. This stage suggests that minority groups are no longer depicted in a diverging way from the dominant group, and that they are portrayed in a realistic and normalized manner (Fitzgerald, 2010).

A key segment of public life where subtle forms of prejudice and stereotyping takes place, concerns the labor market. Employment, socioeconomic status, and social mobility are important aspects that determine citizens' social position in society (Hollingshead, 1975). Historically, both women and ethnic minorities have experienced discrimination with regard to equal access to the labor market (Cain, 1986). In recent decades, however, the gender and ethnic composition of the labor market in Western European societies has

changed dramatically. Eurostat statistics, for instance, show that female participation in the labor market in the European Union has increased from 42.0% in 1998 to 46.1% in 2013. Furthermore, statistics indicate that the number of foreign-born workers in the European Union has increased from 4.2% in 1998 to 10.5% in 2013 (Eurostat, 2014). Given the fact that these figures show that the labor market itself is rapidly changing, it is theoretically relevant to investigate whether television reflects these rapid social changes.

Considering the potential socialization role of television in contemporary western societies, it is therefore crucial to assess how television depicts the occupational roles of ethnic minorities and women. With regard to gender roles, scholars have intensively studied stereotyping of women in certain occupations by television and its impact on the perpetuation of stereotypes in society (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Hoffner et al., 2006; Hoffner, Levine, & Toohey, 2008; Jeffries-Fox & Jeffries-Fox, 1981; Lauzen et al., 2008). Conclusions are that children, if consistently exposed to media messages of men in high-status jobs and women in non-professional contexts or low status-jobs, may develop cognitive associations with regard to gender roles (Jeffries-Fox & Jeffries-Fox, 1981; Lauzen et al., 2008; Signorielli, 2009). In this way, girls may perceive high-status jobs for women as exceptional, which risks to discourage them to aspire high-status jobs. The portrayal of ethnic minorities in terms of their socioeconomic position may have consequences as well. One of the main motives underlying ethnic prejudice is the perceived threat resulting from the economic burden immigrants are believed to place on the economy and on public spending (O'Rourke & Sinnott, 2006). Past research has shown that ethnic minorities' perceived socioeconomic status is indeed crucial when evaluating immigration, and thus strongly impacts public opinion (Harell, Soroka, Iyengar, & Valentino, 2012).

In sum, we can say it is highly relevant to assess exactly how television depicts women and ethnic minorities in terms of their socioeconomic position, as this is linked to broader patterns of inequality and prejudice in society.

Television and Occupational Roles

Signorielli has stated that "occupational roles are central to most, if not all, of television's stories" (1993, p. 316). The conclusion of the research on this topic has been remarkably clear and consistent over time: television presents its viewers a distorted view of the labor world in which certain occupations are consistently being overrepresented, while others are underrepresented. This holds for both fiction and non-fiction, although most studies make no distinction (Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2009). There is a widespread consensus in the literature that television is mainly preoccupied with the portrayal of high-status, glamorous, and appealing jobs, such as professionals (doctors, lawyers, managers) to the expense of lower-status, less glamorous, and less appealing jobs, such as blue-collar occupations (DeFleur, 1964; Dominick, 1973; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2009). Although this is not the main focus of this article, we expect that this traditional stratification is still present despite the rapid transformation of the labor market:

H1: *High-status occupations are the most frequently portrayed occupations on primetime television.*

Women and Ethnic Minorities in Occupational Roles on Television

More theoretically relevant in the light of the current study, however, is the concern scholars have expressed about the demographic profile of the portrayals. Although there

has been some attention for age in the literature (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Signorielli, 2004), most of these studies deal with gender and ethnic status.

As one of the most basic findings, the television's world of occupations has been called a "man's world"(DeFleur, 1964; Eschholz et al., 2002; Greenberg & Collette, 1997) with men dominating the professional environment on television. This conclusion holds for various television genres, including non-fiction and fiction (most notably films, soap operas and television commercials). Women are more likely than men to have an unknown occupational status, and are more likely to be unemployed or to be portrayed in a domestic environment (Das, 2011; Glascock, 2001; Luyt, 2011; Paek, Nelson, & Vilela, 2010; Rivadeneyra, 2011; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001). Emons, Wester, and Scheepers, for instance, concluded in their study on gender roles that Dutch television commercials construct an image in which "he works outside the home", while "she drinks coffee and does the dishes" (2010, p. 50). Women are more likely to engage in interpersonal interactions than in professional interactions (Lauzen et al., 2008). Recently, some evolutions towards a more balanced gender representation have been noted (Emons, Wester, & Scheepers, 2010). In her 2011 content analysis of Spanish-language telenovelas, Rivadeneyra still found that almost 57% of the portrayed men on television are employed, while only 36% of the women could be identified as being employed (2011, p. 215). Women are also far more likely to be depicted in the role of home-maker than men. Studies have also reported a discrepancy in the variation of roles in which men and women are portrayed (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Eschholz et al., 2002). Men are typically depicted in a wider range of roles (Eschholz et al., 2002). In addition, the presence of traditional masculine and feminine gender roles on television is a well-documented phenomenon (Glascock, 2001; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Rubie-Davies, Liu, & Lee, 2013; Smith,

Pieper, Granados, & Choueiti, 2010). Women, for instance, are more likely to be portrayed as housewives, secretaries, or nurses, while men occupy the majority of law enforcement and military occupations on television. Studies have shown that these stereotyped gender roles are persistent in television commercials as well, since women are more frequently portrayed in commercials for cosmetics, food, and home products (Das, 2011; Luyt, 2011). Most studies arrive at the conclusion that, generally, women are portrayed in less prestigious jobs, whereas prestigious jobs are reserved for male characters (Signorielli, 1993, 2009). Das (2011), and Emons and colleagues (2010), for instance, observed that men in commercials more often appear in authoritative and decision-making roles, while women are shown in subordinate positions. Rivadeneyra (2011), too, found that men are more likely to be shown in settings that stress values like power and money. However, evidence with regard to occupational prestige is mixed. Escholtz and colleagues (2002), investigating the occupational prestige of 1996 leading film characters, found no significant gender differences. Luyt (2011) found women in South African television advertising to be more frequently portrayed in middle or upper class settings than men. Mastro and Greenberg (2000) found income levels for women and men on television to be equally high in their study on fictional entertainment programs in the US. Nevertheless, and in line with the majority of previous studies, we can hypothesize:

H2: *There is a negative relationship between high occupational status on primetime television and being a woman.*

Inequalities, however, are not only related to gender, but also to ethnic status. In addition, the occupational status of ethnic minority characters is more frequently unknown compared to ethnic majority actors (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001). Minorities are more

likely to be portrayed as unemployed as well. Moreover, studies have repeatedly reported stereotypical depictions about the type of occupations in which they appear. Ethnic minorities are less likely to be portrayed in professional roles than ethnic majority members, and are more likely to be portrayed as a law enforcement officer or in blue collar jobs. While some studies have suggested more diversification in the type of occupational roles for ethnic minority characters (Stroman, Merritt, & Matabane, 1989), the overall consensus remains that generally they are seldom represented in upper-class settings (Gray, 1989; Trebbe & Schoenhagen, 2011). Finally, the few studies focusing on occupational prestige have found that ethnic minorities are represented in less prestigious occupations (Eschholz et al., 2002; Signorielli, 2004, 2009). In a study analyzing lead roles in popular 1996 films, the discrepancy in average occupational prestige between ethnic minority and ethnic majority characters proved to be very large with ethnic minorities occupying less prestigious jobs (Eschholz et al., 2002). Mastro and Greenberg (2000) found that African Americans were portrayed in roles generating the lowest level of respect in entertainment programs. A decade later, a replication of this study found that Latinos had taken over this role (Monk-Turner, Heiserman, Johnson, Cotton, & Jackson, 2010). In line with the majority of previous studies, we can therefore hypothesize:

H3: *There is a negative relationship between high occupational status on primetime television and belonging to an ethnic minority group.*

While numerous studies have analyzed the portrayal of women and ethnic minorities in occupational roles separately, studies that systematically assess the combined impact of gender and ethnic status are scarce. The concept of intersectionality, i.e. the idea that the intersection of different forms of inequality (typically gender, race and class) impacts patterns of exclusion in society, has recently attracted more scholarly attention (Choo &

Ferree, 2010; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Verloo, 2006). Therefore, it is relevant to address the effect of combined inequalities on stereotyping processes on television with regard to occupational status. Theorizing from the point of view of intersectionality, we would expect a differential impact for actors with a double minority status. The fourth hypothesis therefore states:

H4: *Occupational status on primetime television is especially low for female members of ethnic minority groups.*

Thus far, our hypotheses aim to evaluate the type of occupational roles that are portrayed on television. However, as Dixon and Linz (2000, p. 134) note, it is equally important to examine the accuracy of these representations, especially in the light of the rapid changes that are taking place in the labor market. Put differently, the question whether television constitutes a truthful representation of societal change needs to be assessed as well. It is crucial, therefore, to determine how television reflects social reality. In order to investigate how the portrayal of women and ethnic minorities in occupational roles diverges from society, we supplement our data with real-world indicators about occupational status. Several of the studies already cited have also adopted such an interreality comparison (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Rubie-Davies et al., 2013; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001). Based on these studies, we formulate the following research question:

RQ1: In what specific manner do television portrayals depart from the current demographical composition of the labor force?

Data and Methods

Sample. To evaluate the hypotheses, we conducted a content analysis of Belgian primetime television. The time frame consisted of two randomly constructed weeks from 19 February 2013 through 13 June 2013. Past research has shown that the use of randomly constructed week sampling strategies, where days are randomly sampled to 'construct' a week in which every day is represented equally, reduces the risk of bias due to cyclical trends. A constructed week sampling technique is thus to be preferred over simple random or consecutive day sampling (Hester & Dougall, 2007). Since we aim to assess our hypotheses using evidence from Belgium, the specific features of the Belgian context need to be taken into account. Belgium is a federal state in which the two largest communities, the Dutch and French speaking community, have two completely distinct media systems (Sinardet, 2013). We therefore included the largest public and commercial stations from both the Dutch and the French speaking community in the sample. As for the French speaking stations, the public broadcasting station 'RTBF La Une' had an average market share of 14.6% in 2012, while the average market share of the commercial broadcasting station 'RTL-TVi' amounted to 20.1% in the same period. As for the Dutch stations, the public broadcasting station 'VRT' had an average market share of 31.6% in 2012, while the largest commercial broadcasting station 'VTM' attracted an average of 18.6% of the television viewers in 2012 (CIM TV, 2012). We decided to include only primetime programming in the sample, i.e. broadcasts between 6pm and 11pm, mainly because these programs attract a large number of television viewers. For this study, only non-fiction television programs were analyzed, like news broadcasts, talk shows, quizzes, sports games, and reality programs. This selection was made because we can assume that especially non-fiction programs will provide the viewers with cues on how to interpret their own society.

A considerable part of the non-fictional data presented here concerns news broadcasts content, as news has been shown to exert substantial influence on the shaping of opinions on various issues in society (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Moreover, research has recently suggested that audiences are more profoundly impacted by realistic programs that are close in proximity (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003). If we want to determine the effect on specific evaluations of their own living environment, it can be assumed that viewers pay more attention to media images that show a more realistic, 'nearby' reality. We therefore assume that non-fiction and news in the Belgian context – as this is a large part of our sample – is perceived to be more realistic than fiction programs that, in the Belgian context, are often bought on the international market and therefore reflect different cultural traditions.

Unit of Analysis. The unit of analysis for this study was the television character, shown in a Belgian context, portrayed on primetime television in a communicating role. We limit ourselves to characters operating in a Belgian context, because we expect that viewers do not necessarily relate the information that is present in programs that have been bought on the international market (i.e. mainly from US broadcasters) to the situation in their own society. By communication we mean that the character had to be visible on screen while conveying an auditive message. In practice, this came down to every character with a speaking role. For each of these television characters an assessment was made of several demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, occupational status, and ethnic status. This evaluation was made using only information directly available from the program, the point of reference being the modal television viewer. Characteristics needed to be clear in order to be coded. Moreover, coders were asked to ignore any prior background information they might have about the program or television characters in question.

Coding and Inter-coder Reliability. The coding was conducted by three well-instructed coders, i.e. by the main author of this article and two students majoring in social sciences. During the coder training the coding scheme was explained in detail and some test episodes were coded. These test episodes were monitored, and feedback was given on the coding of the variables. In order to evaluate the inter-coder reliability approximately 5% of the sample was double-coded. The Krippendorff's Alpha for the variables included for this study ranged from 0.71 (age) to 0.96 (gender), which is satisfactory to good (Krippendorff, 2004).

Variables. The dependent variable is the International Standard Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status 2008 (ISEI-08). We opted to use this measure because it can be considered an internationally comparable standard measure for occupational status (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 2010). This measure for occupational prestige takes both the direct and indirect, 'mediated' effects via occupation of education on earnings into account. It is widely accepted as a reliable instrument to quantify occupational prestige, and many large-scale project, such as GESIS, ICCS and PISA, have adopted this index. The dependent variable in the analysis, therefore, is the prestige that is associated with a specific job function. In line with international standards (Fuchs & Wößmann, 2007; Magnusson, 2009; Marks, 2006; Zhou, 2005), we have considered this prestige score as a continuous variable, ranging from the lowest prestige (associated with 'hunters and trappers') to the very highest (associated with 'judges'). First, the profession was coded using ISCO-08 categories (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 2010), and subsequently the prestige score for this specific profession was used as a dependent variable in the analysis.

The first set of independent variables concern demographic variables: gender, age, and ethnic status. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable. Age, which we took up

as a control variable, was operationalized as an ordinal variable consisting of seven categories. With regard to ethnic status, we made a distinction between 'Belgian natives', 'non-native EU citizens', and 'non-native non-EU citizens'. In the Belgian context, ethnic diversity mainly refers to the presence of migrant populations originating from Turkey, Morocco, and other Mediterranean countries that have arrived as guest workers and later via family reunification in the 1960s. Measurements of anti-immigrants sentiments show that these sentiments do not seem to have a bearing on immigrants from neighboring European countries, but specifically refer to immigrants and their descendants from non-European societies (Hooghe & de Vroome, 2015; Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006). Therefore, in this study, we differentiate between non-natives from within the EU and non-natives from outside the EU. While Belgium is a linguistically divided country (with Dutch and French language communities), these groups are usually not considered as ethnic minorities.

Television characters were operationalized as being Belgian natives when the available information (name, language, physiological characteristics) indicated that they belong to the native majority population of Belgium. Clues referred to contextual information, such as the character's name (if known), the presence of cultural or religious symbols, language or dialect cues, skin color, and reporting by self or others. For television characters that, based on this information, were identified as non-natives, the ethnic group was further specified using the same contextual information to distinguish between EU and non-EU citizens. Each television character thus belongs to only one group.

While the main focus is on the demographic variables, we decided to make use of our extended sample and to include television-related variables as well to distinguish differential patterns in occupational prestige. Belgium has a media system which is quite

representative for other European countries, as strong public broadcasters exist alongside commercial players. In 2011, the public broadcasting station in the Dutch language community of Belgium had a market share of 41.3%, while on average within Western Europe this is 31.2% (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2013). As is common in studies on Europe, therefore, we have to make a distinction between commercial and public television (Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010). Furthermore, we test differences between Dutch and French-speaking stations, and between news and other non-fiction programs.

Analysis and Results

Television Portrayals of Occupational Roles

We first present descriptive data in order to clarify the composition of our sample and to answer the first hypothesis (H1) about the most frequently portrayed occupational roles on television. A total of 273 hours of television, consisting of 178 different programs, was coded. Using the methods and selection criteria described above, we identified 4,418 television characters. For 1,527 or 34.6% of these television characters it was not possible to determine the occupational status on the basis of information directly derivable from the program. The data show that women are almost twice more likely to have an unknown occupational status (36.9%) than men (20.8%). This indeed confirms that women more often than men are portrayed in less clearly defined professional roles. Moreover, non-EU non-natives were more likely to have an unknown occupational status (33.1%) compared to EU non-natives (22.2%) and Belgian natives (26.3%). Filtering out the television characters with an undetermined occupational status resulted in including 2,843 television characters with a known occupational status in our analyses. The majority of these characters are male (72%), approximately one-fourth (28%) are female. Although we did not formulate a

hypothesis on this distribution, the evidence supports findings from prior studies that the television labor force is dominated by men. A large majority of the television characters (89%) are native Belgians, 7% are non-natives from other EU countries and 4% of all characters are non-natives from outside the EU.

Considering the average ISEI-08 scores, there is clear evidence that H1, which states that the most frequently portrayed occupations on television are the highly prestigious ones, is supported by our data. First, while the score for occupational status ranges from 11 to 89, the average score in the sample is 62.3. Following the ILO-classification, this score would be equivalent to the score for managers. Second, this conclusion is confirmed when we take a closer look at the distribution of the occupations as displayed in Table 1. Professionals (doctors, lawyers, journalists, etc.) make up 47.9% of the television characters, and 26.7% of the characters are shown in in the role of manager. Both occupations have the highest rank in the ISEI-08 index for occupational status. Our content analysis thus endorses the conclusions by prior research that mainly highly prestigious occupations are frequently represented on primetime television. In fact, almost nine out of ten television characters (87.1%) belong to the top four high-status occupations.

– Table 1 –

In order to evaluate H2, H3 and H4, we present a regression analysis in Table 2.[1] Given the continuous character of our occupational prestige measurement, we conduct ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors. In Model I we consider the demographic variables, and although it has to be noted that the explained variance for this

[1] The current analysis is only based on non-fiction programs. If we include also fiction programs in the analysis, the number of observations rises to 3,172. In that case, the results of the analysis remain the same. It has to be noted, however, that the information about labor market roles is far less clear or reliable in television fiction than it is in non-fiction.

model does remain rather low, we do observe a number of clear results. In this model, gender makes a significant contribution. In contrast to what we expected in H2, however, women have a higher average score for occupational status than men. Age matters too, as a higher age is positively associated with a higher ISEI-08 score. Belgian natives do not have a significantly higher score than EU non-native television characters. Non-EU non-natives, however, do have significantly lower scores for occupational status. Model I thus confirms H3. In Model II we add the television variables. While the previous conclusions about the demographic variables remain valid, we observe that on public stations and newscasts television characters are shown with a higher occupational status than on commercial stations and other non-fiction programs. Apparently, public television indeed offers more of an elite representation of social reality than commercial television (De Swert & Hooghe, 2010). Moreover, there is a significant difference between Dutch and French-speaking stations, with lower occupational status scores on Dutch language stations. Inspection of the data shows that this result can be explained by programming differences: French-speaking stations disseminate proportionally more documentaries, in which persons have higher status occupations, while Dutch-speaking stations disseminate more entertainment non-fiction programs (quizzes, talk shows), where occupational status scores are generally lower. Finally, Model III includes interactions between gender and Belgian natives, and between gender and non-EU non-natives, in order to assess H4 on intersectionality. Both interactions are significant. This suggests that native Belgian women and women from outside the European Union are more often portrayed in lower occupational roles than non-native women from the European Union, and this partly confirms H4.

– Table 2 –

The most surprising result is that women have higher average scores for occupational status than men. In order to explain this finding, we consider the gender distribution for occupational status in more detail. Figure 1 plots the gender balance for low occupational status (ISEI-08<20), middle occupational status (ISEI-08 20–75), and high occupational status (ISEI-08>75). In each category men are represented at a higher rate than women, which is to be expected given the skewed gender distribution in the total sample. We notice, however, that the lower the occupational status, the higher the proportion of men. The data thus seems to suggest that the higher average score for women for occupational status can be explained by the stronger male presence in low-status jobs, rather than by a strong female representation in high-status jobs. There is hardly evidence that women are frequently represented in high-status occupations. Indeed, although for high-status occupations the gender balance is more equal than for the middle and lowest status jobs, men (65.9%) still outnumber women (34.1%). A more likely explanation for the higher average scores for women is, therefore, that the extreme low status scores for men exert downwards pressure on the average scores for men. We can thus conclude that the results reveal a complex reality: while men outnumber women in identifiable occupations, women have on average higher occupational status scores than men. This is, however, not due to an overrepresentation of women in high-status occupation, but by a lack of women in low-status occupations. The results thus only provide very partial support for H2.

– Figure 1 –

How Does Television Diverge from Reality?

In this paragraph, we investigate in what specific manner the demographic composition of the television labor world diverges from society. In Table 3, we supplement

the television findings with data from the Belgian ministry of Economy survey on occupations held by the Belgian population. This labor survey is generally believed to be highly reliable. These official statistics on the Belgian labor force use ISCO-08 categories as well, making it possible to directly compare television portrayals with real-life indicators.[2] We conducted two-proportion Z-tests in order to test whether differences between television and reality are statistically significant. The used formula controls for the sample size and a strict threshold ($p < 0.001$) is maintained in order to ensure optimal reliability of the results. Table 3 presents the findings. In reality the types of occupations are relatively evenly distributed among the population. Comparing this distribution with television content makes clear that the two highest-status occupations, professionals (+ 26.4%) and managers (+ 18.6%), are significantly overrepresented. Moreover, with the exception of agricultural jobs, low-status occupations are significantly underrepresented on television. We can conclude that a television bias in the direction of highly prestigious occupations is present.

– Table 3 –

In Tables 4 and 5 we adopt the same strategy to assess how the demographic profile of the television labor world diverges from the real labor world. A limitation is that, on the basis of the data currently available, we can only make a distinction between men and women, and between Belgian and non-Belgians. The information with regard to Belgians and non-Belgians is thus based on the nationality criterion, while our coding of ethnic minority status was based on visible characteristics. Both techniques therefore cannot be fully compared.

[2] Here we have confined ourselves to the ten large ISCO-08 categories as the labor statistics in Belgium only have records for the ten largest categories.

We first consider the interrole comparisons between television and reality for gender. ‘Interrole comparison’ means that we compare the gender balance for each type of occupation between television and reality. Table 4 displays the results. It is clear that on television men are far more overrepresented in occupational roles than this is the case in society. The gender balance in the Belgian labor force is 54.4% men and 45.6% women, i.e. more equally distributed than on television (72% men, 28% women). In reality there is no clear pattern of women or men consistently occupying low or high-status jobs. We can summarize the findings with regard to the interrole comparison in two ways. First, we note that for seven out of ten occupational groups there are significant differences between television and reality; television thus consistently overrepresents higher occupational categories. Second, this bias follows a clear pattern along gender lines: women are consistently underrepresented in the low-status occupations on television compared to reality, while men are overrepresented in these occupations.

– Table 4 –

Table 5 presents the interrole comparison between television and reality for ethnic status. In the actual labor force 8.9% of the people are non-natives. This percentage is quite similar to the percentage of non-Belgians making up the television labor force (11%). Considering the types of occupations, we notice that in reality non-Belgians make up 16.6% of ‘Elementary Occupations’, and 11.9% of ‘Managers’. They are not more likely to hold low-status jobs in society. Relating this information to television portrayals makes clear that almost no significant differences between television and reality are present, with the exception of overrepresentation of non-natives in the occupation of ‘Technicians & Associate Professionals’. The interrole comparisons for ethnic status therefore suggest that

television and reality largely converge, although it has be repeated here that indicators are not strictly comparable.

– Table 5 –

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the debate on the stereotypical depiction of women and ethnic minorities in occupational roles on primetime television. The approach was two-fold. First, we investigated which occupational roles are most frequently portrayed on television, and whether there are systematical patterns in the demographic profile of these occupational roles. Second, we related these television portrayals of occupational roles to real-life indicators of the labor force in order to determine how television representations diverge from changes in the real labor world.

With respect to television portrayals of occupational roles, we can draw four main conclusions. First, our study corroborates previous findings that the television labor world is still very masculine with more than three-quarters of the television characters with a known occupation being male. Women in professional roles continue to receive less attention than what we could expect based on their representation and increasing participation in the labor market. As such, we can speculate that television indeed contributes to gender bias in this regard. Second, with regard to the most frequently portrayed occupational roles on television, the evidence clearly points in the direction of a bias towards high-status occupations. Third, and surprisingly, women have higher average scores for occupational status than men, a finding diverging strongly from previous studies. While earlier studies focused on the underrepresentation of women in high-status professional roles, this underrepresentation is just as strong in low-status industrial and

manual labor roles. It is important to note therefore that women are not just absent from high-prestige jobs, as has been abudantly documented by previous studies, but also from the world of manual labor, despite the fact that our comparison with labor force statistics shows that women are present in these occupations. While female chief executives are virtually absent on television, the same can be said about female industrial workers, a fact that has not been presented in the literature yet. Fourth and finally, ethnic minorities have lower scores for occupational status, which is in line with previous evidence.

To examine how these television portrayals are related to the real labor world, they were compared to information on the Belgian labor force. The general conclusion is that the labor world as depicted on television is more masculine and glamorous than in reality. Non-natives are represented on television at a rate commensurate to their real proportion in occupational roles, but the underrepresentation of women in occupational roles is slightly more persistent among non-natives than among natives. Moreover, men are consistently overrepresented on television in both low-status and high-status occupations compared to reality, while women are consistently underrepresented in these types of occupations. This implies that the lower average score for occupational status for men can be mainly explained by this systematical overrepresentation of men in low-status occupations. Indeed, 81% of the people portrayed in occupations with an ISEI-08 score below 20 is male (mostly industry and agriculture), but 65% of people with an ISEI-08 score over 75 is male as well.

A theoretically relevant and innovating finding is that women are not only underrepresented in high prestige jobs, but also in depictions of manual labor. Previous studies have tried to operationalize gender stereotyping in a one-dimensional manner, by focusing only on high or low prestige scores. Our findings suggest, however, that also gendered professional roles play a role. While in most operationalizations office jobs obtain

a higher score than manual labor, these pink-collar jobs do refer to qualities that are traditionally associated with women. Furthermore, they also tend to be jobs with less career opportunities. They also express the association between masculinity and physical work while women are more routinely associated with 'softer', clerical work. Our conclusion therefore can be that the narrowcasting of women in labor settings cannot be summarized by using just one dimension of more or less prestige, but is also related to traditional stereotypes about masculinity and femininity. The absence of ethnic minorities in high-status occupations may impact public opinion as well. The perceived socioeconomic status of ethnic minorities and immigrants is a key element individuals consider when evaluating the costs and benefits of immigration. Consistent television depictions of ethnic minorities in low-status occupations may strongly shape public opinion by leading citizens to believe that ethnic minorities pose a 'realistic', economic threat to the persistence of the welfare system. In this way the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in high-status occupations may perpetuate prejudice in society. Finally, our study's results show that patterns of intersectionality seem to be present. We indeed observe that especially female non-EU non-natives have low average scores for occupational status on television, suggesting patterns of double inequality may be at play. Moreover, the data has shown that almost half of the female non-EU non-natives have an unknown occupational status as well. For no other group the percentage of actors with an unknown occupation was higher. The evidence, however, is not entirely unambiguous, since female EU non-natives were shown to have higher average scores for occupational status than female Belgian natives, which presents a counter-intuitive result. A speculative note could be that low-status women from outside the country are hardly represented in media depictions with as a result women from outside the country face a harder challenge in getting media-attention than men from outside the

country. The consequence is that the sample of non-native women is highly exceptional. This does suggest indeed that intersectional stereotyping mechanisms are present here.

Several limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. Our study presents data from a content analysis and only investigates television depictions of occupational roles. Observational data do not allow us to investigate how these television portrayals are linked to stereotypical beliefs about the socioeconomic status of women and ethnic minorities. Future research should therefore investigate how these television depictions interact with opinions on gender roles in the labor market and the prevalence of realistic threat in society. Moreover, the current study did not investigate the narratives underlying the portrayals of women and ethnic minorities. A line for future investigation would be to examine how women and ethnic minorities are framed in these different professions. Are they framed as being role models or as exceptions? Are they depicted as being competent for the job or not? Also, these subtle framing differences presumably have large implications and reflect the presence of prejudice, and should therefore be examined more carefully in future research. Finally, in this study we limited ourselves to non-fiction. It remains to be investigated, however, whether non-fiction or fiction programs actually have the strongest impact on society. Therefore, future studies should address fictional content as well to establish whether the same patterns of social reality construction are at play.

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Table 1. Most commonly portrayed occupations on Belgian Primetime Television

ISCO-08 Occupation	ISEI-08 Prestige Score	N	Percentage
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery Workers	18	52	1.8
Elementary Occupations	20	74	2.6
Service and Sales Workers	31	201	7.1
Plant and Machine Operators & Assemblers	32	2	0.1
Crafts & Related Trades Workers	35	24	0.8
Clerical Support Workers	41	11	0.4
Technicians & Associate Professionals	51	345	12.1
Armed Forces Occupations	53	12	0.4
Managers	62	760	26.7
Professionals	65	1,362	47.9

Distribution of all characters in the dataset, divided in broad ISCO occupation categories. N=2,843.

Table 2. Predicting Occupational Status on Belgian Primetime Television

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Intercept	50.419(2.431)***	50.423(2.521)***	47.700(2.498)***
Demographic Variables			
Gender: Woman	2.603(0.746)***	2.895(0.739)***	12.601(2.531)***
Age Group	2.847(0.494)***	2.080(0.471)***	2.124(0.471)***
Ethnic status (ref.: EU Non-native)			
Belgian native	-0.602(1.179)	-0.158(1.175)	2.442(1.308)
Non-EU Non-native	-5.679(1.939)**	-5.488(1.882)**	-2.389(2.093)
Television variables			
Public Station		2.408(0.685)***	2.456(0.685)***
Dutch language Station		-3.375(0.652)***	-3.259(0.654)***
Newscast		5.932(0.678)***	5.932(0.677)***
Interactions			
Woman*Belgian native			-10.257(2.642)***
Woman*Non-EU Non-native			-12.300(4.412)**
R^2	1,8%	5,4%	5,8%

Note: Entries are the result of an OLS Regression with Robust Standard Errors. Dependent variable: ISEI-08 Occupational Prestige Score. Sign.***:<.001; **:<.01; *:<.05. N=2,843.

Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Occupational Status in Low-Middle-High Categories

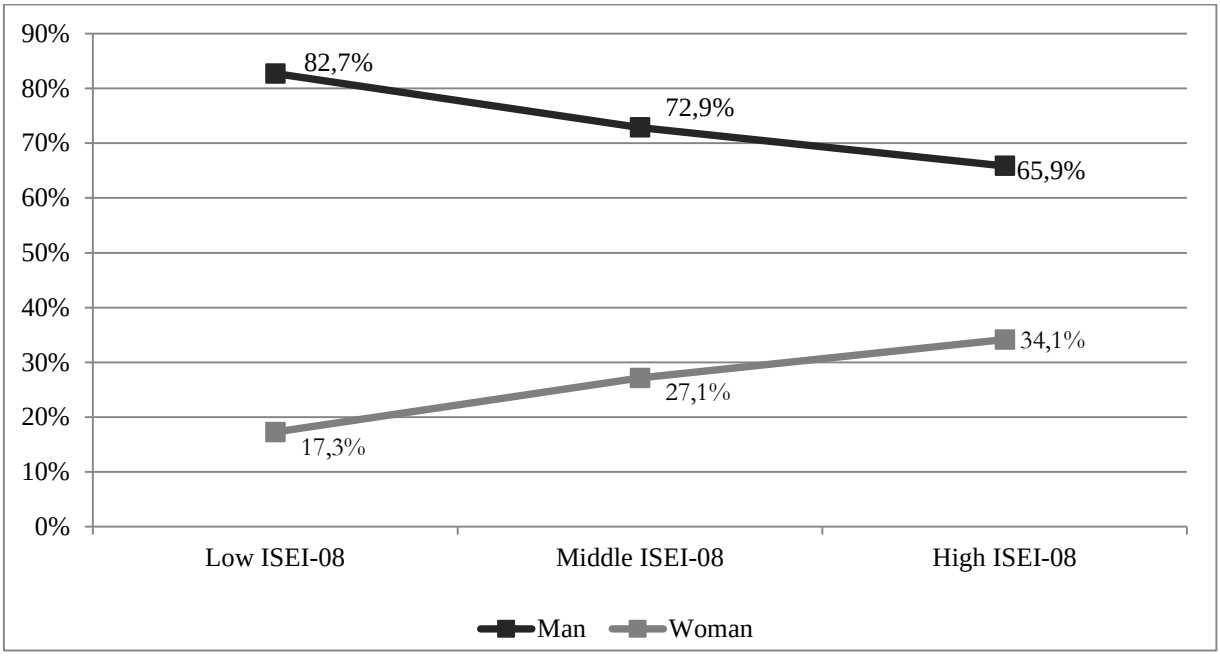

Table 3. Interreality Comparison Occupations - General

ISCO-08 Occupation	ISEI-08 Prestige Score	TV Content	Real Labor Market	Difference
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery Workers	18	1.0	1.2	-0.2
Elementary Occupations	20	2.6	10.0	-7.4***
Service and Sales Workers	31	1.8	13.5	-11.7***
Plant and Machine Operators & Assemblers	32	0.1	6.4	-6.3***
Crafts & Related Trades Workers	35	0.8	10.7	-9.9***
Clerical Support Workers	41	0.4	12.8	-12.4***
Technicians & Associate Professionals	51	12.1	15.1	-3.0
Armed Forces Occupations	53	0.4	0.7	-0.3
Managers	62	26.7	8.1	+18.6***
Professionals	65	47.9	21.5	+26.4***

Columns are proportion in coded television content (N=2,843) and in the real life labor market of Belgium, and the difference

between those two. Sign.***:<.001; **:<.01; *:<.05. Source: Ministry of Economy, Department of Statistics, 'Enquête naar de Arbeidskrachten 2012'

Table 4. Interrole Comparisons TV – Reality for Gender

ISCO-08 Occupation	ISEI-08 Prestige Score	Gender Balance TV Content (Women/Men)	Gender Balance Labor Market (Women/Men)	Difference TV and Reality
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery Workers	18	9.6/90.4	16.6/83.4	+7.0
Elementary Occupations	20	23.0/77.0	64.3/35.7	+41.3***
Service and Sales Workers	31	35.3/64.7	65.3/34.7	+30.0***
Plant and Machine Operators & Assemblers	32	0.0/100.0	12.6/87.4	+12.6***
Crafts & Related Trades Workers	35	16.7/83.3	5.7/94.3	-11.0
Clerical Support Workers	41	54.5/45.5	60.5/39.5	+6.0
Technicians & Associate Professionals	51	12.2/87.8	44.4/55.6	+32.2***
Armed Forces Occupations	53	0.0/100.0	6.8/93.2	+6.8***
Managers	62	21.1/78.9	32.4/67.6	+11.4***
Professionals	65	36.0/64.0	53.6/45.4	+17.6***
All occupations	-	28.0/72.0	45.6/54.4	+17.6***

Entries are: gender division (women/men) in television content, in the labor market, and the difference between those two (positive=more men on television than in reality). Sign.***:<.001; **:<.01; *:<.05. Source: Ministry of SPF Economy, Department of Statistics, 'Enquête naar de Arbeidskrachten 2012'.

Table 5. Interrole Comparisons TV – Reality for Ethnic Status

ISCO-08 Occupation	ISEI-08 Prestige Score	Balance TV Content (Native/non-Native)	Balance Labor Market (Belgian/non-Belgian)	Difference TV and Reality
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery Workers	18	100.0/0.0	97.5/(2.5)	+2.5
Elementary Occupations	20	81.1/18.9	83.4/16.6	-2.4
Service and Sales Workers	31	91.5/8.5	91.3/8.7	+0.2
Plant and Machine Operators & Assemblers	32	100.0/0.0	92.5/7.5	+7.5
Crafts & Related Trades Workers	35	91.7/8.3	88.4/11.6	+3.3
Clerical Support Workers	41	90.9/9.1	93.2/6.8	-2.3
Technicians & Associate Professionals	51	78.3/21.7	93.8/6.2	-15.5***
Armed Forces Occupations	53	100.0/0.0	96.6/(3.4)	+3.4
Managers	62	88.2/11.8	88.1/11.9	+0.1
Professionals	65	91.7/8.3	92.8/7.2	-1.1
All occupations	-	89.0/11.0	91.1/8.9	-1.1

Entries are: division ethnic status (natives/non-natives) in television content, division ethnic status (Belgian/non-Belgian) in labor market, and the difference between those two (positive=more natives on television than in reality). Sign.***:<.001; **:<.01; *:<.05. Source: Ministry of Economy, Department of Statistics, 'Enquête naar de Arbeidskrachten 2012'. Percentages between brackets were made on the basis of a small N.

APPENDIX A: Descriptives

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
ISEI-08 Occupational Prestige Score	2,843	11	89	62.3
Gender (1 = Woman)	2,843	0	1	0.28
Age Group	2,833	0	5	2.21
Belgian native (1 = Yes)	2,843	0	1	0.89
EU Non-native (1 = Yes)	2,840	0	1	0.07
Non-EU Non-native (1 = Yes)	2,840	0	1	0.04
Public station (1 = Yes)	2,843	0	1	0.60
Dutch language station (1 = Yes)	2,843	0	1	0.56
News Broadcast (1 = Yes)	2,843	0	1	0.53

APPENDIX B: Mean ISEI-08 Occupational Prestige for Gender and Ethnic Status

Ethnic Status		Average ISEI-08 Occupational Prestige Score
Belgian native	Man	62.13
	Woman	63.37
	Total	62.48
EU Non-native	Man	60.42
	Woman	72.08
	Total	63.36
Non-EU Non-native	Man	56.26
	Woman	56.15
	Total	56.24
Total	Man	61.75
	Woman	63.63
	Total	62.28

APPENDIX C: Distribution Actors with an Unknown Occupation for Gender and Ethnic Status

	% Man	% Woman	% Total
Belgian natives	20.9%	36.3%	26.3%
EU non-native	16.2%	35.3%	22.2%
Non-EU non-native	24.2%	49.3%	33.1%
Total	20.8%	36.9%	26.4%